

POORLY WRITTEN MEETING MINUTES WASTE HOURS IN READING TIME

Business meetings, though often disparaged, provide a forum through which participants can authorise actions and present, debate and resolve problems. An essential part of the meeting process is documentation of proceedings in a written summary called the "minutes."

But despite their name, the minutes of many corporate, government and community meetings can consume unnecessary hours in reading time if they're unskillfully written.

The verbosity common in meeting minutes is often the result of failure to recognise that taking minutes is different from taking dictation. Minutes should not contain a verbatim account of all discussion that took place during a meeting. Resist the urge to include Connie's indignant objection to Phil's clearly self-serving comments. Heck, Phil attended the meeting mainly because of the free blueberry muffins and fruit juice. Instead, minutes should document only official decisions and actions that occur during a meeting. The only verbatim language required in meeting minutes is the precise wording of motions that were passed.

A meeting secretary who is uncertain of the exact wording of a motion should ask it to be re-read before its passage.

The person who is designated to record minutes ideally should not be a participant in the meeting, but rather an observer whose role is simply to document proceedings objectively and accurately. The recording secretary is in effect the historian for the meeting body. Recording accurate minutes requires concentration, an understanding of the fundamental issues at hand, and the ability to accurately summarise by excluding irrelevant material and distilling the key points.

Some styles for minutes are more limiting than others, and can be classified into three formats:

1. **"Report"**: a comprehensive record of all discussions, written in a narrative style that includes the names of all speakers, movers and seconders of any motions;
2. **"Minutes of narration"**: a legal form that includes a summary of principal discussions.
3. **"Minutes of resolution"**: a compact legal form that documents the precise wording of resolutions that were passed, but does not indicate the names of individuals who introduced or seconded motions.

And don't feel obligated to report that Phil took three leftover blueberry muffins back to his office.

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